From Village to Empire: an Introduction to the History of Rome

Lecture 13: Julius Caesar

73 Caesar becomes *pontifex*
69 Caesar quaestor
65 Caesar aedile
63 C. Julius Caesar elected *pontifex maximus* and praetor (for 62)
62 Caesar departs for Spain (propraetor)
60 Caesar returns from Spain
59 Caesar consul with L. Calpurnius Bibulus; P. Vatinius
58 P. Clodius
57 T. Annius Milo
56 Conference at Luca
55 Pompey and M. Licinius Crassus consuls
54 Death of Julia
53 Crassus defeated and killed by Parthians at Carrhae
52 Death of Clodius; Pompey sole consul
49 M. Antonius; Caesar leaves his province; Pompeians defeated at Ilerda (Spain)
Caesar dictator for first time
48 Pompey defeated at Pharsalus; Pompey killed in Egypt
47 Caesar campaigns in and settles east; returns to Italy; sets out for Africa
46 Caesar defeats Pompeians at Thapsus (Africa); returns to Rome and triumphs; sets out for Spain
45 Caesar defeats Pompeians at Munda (Spain); returns to Rome
44 Dictator for life; Caesar murdered

Lex Gabinia (67)
Lex Mamilia (66)
M. Licinius Crassus (70)

Caesar's expenses

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 5: After the funeral of his wife, he went out to Spain [in 67 BC] as quaestor under Vetus, one of the praetors, whom he never ceased to hold in high esteem, and whose son, in turn, when he himself was praetor, he made his quaestor. After he had served in this office, he married for his third wife Pompeia, having already by Cornelia a daughter who was afterwards married to Pompey the Great. He was unsparing in his outlays of money, and was thought to be purchasing a transient and short-lived fame at a great price, though in reality he was buying things of the highest value at a small price. We are told, accordingly, that before he entered upon any public office he was thirteen hundred talents in debt. Again, being appointed curator of the Appian Way, he expended upon it vast sums of his own money; and again, during his aedileship [66 BC], he furnished three hundred and twenty pairs of gladiators, and by lavish provision besides for theatrical performances, processions, and public banquets, he washed away all memory of the ambitious efforts of his predecessors in the office. By these means he put the people in such a humour that every man of them was seeking out new offices and new honours with which to requite him.

Caesar becomes *pontifex maximus*

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 7: At this time [63 BC], too, Metellus, the *pontifex maximus*, or high priest, died, and though Isauricus and Catulus were candidates for the priesthood, which was an object of great ambition, and though they were most illustrious men and of the greatest in-fluence in the senate, Caesar would not give way to them, but presented himself to the people as a rival candidate. The favour of the electors appeared to be about equally divided, and therefore Catulus, who, as the worthier of Caesar's competitors, dreaded more the uncertainty of the issue, sent and tried to induce Caesar to desist from his ambitious project, offering him large sums of money. But Caesar declared that he would carry the contest through even though he had to borrow still larger sums.

The day for the election came, and as Caesar's mother accompanied him to the door in tears, he kissed her and said: 'Mother, today you shall see your son either *pontifex maximus* or an exile.' The contest was sharp, but when the vote was taken Caesar prevailed, and thereby made the senate and nobles afraid that he would lead the people on to every extreme of recklessness.

Caesar goes to Spain

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 11: Immediately after his praetorship Caesar received Spain as his province, and since he found it hard to arrange matters with his creditors, who obstructed his departure and were clamorous, he had recourse to Crassus, the richest of the Romans, who had need of Caesar's vigour and fire for his political campaign against Pompey. And it was only after Crassus had met the demands of the most importunate and inexorable of these creditors and given surety for eight hundred and thirty talents, that Caesar could go out to his province.

We are told that, as he was crossing the Alps and passing by a barbarian village which had very few inhabitants and was a sorry sight, his companions asked with mirth and laughter, 'Can it be that here too there are ambitious contests for office, struggles for primacy, and mutual jealousies of powerful men?' Whereupon Caesar said to them in all seriousness, 'I would rather be first here than second at Rome.' In like manner we are told again that, in Spain, when he was at leisure and was reading from the history of Alexander, he was lost in thought for a long time, and then burst into tears. His friends were astonished, and asked the reason for his tears. 'Do you not think,' said he, 'it is matter for sorrow that while Alexander, at my age, was already king of so many peoples, I have as yet achieved no brilliant success?'

Caesar strikes up an alliance with Pompey and Crassus

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 13-14.1: Now, since those who sued for the privilege of a triumph must remain outside the city, while those who were candidates for the consulship must be present in the city, Caesar was in a great dilemma, and because he had reached home at the very time for the consular elections, he sent a request to the senate that he might be permitted to offer himself for the consulship in absentia, through the agency of his friends. But since Cato began by insisting upon the law in opposition to Caesar's request, and then, when he saw that many senators had been won over by Caesar's attentions, staved the matter off by consuming the day in speaking, Caesar decided to give up the triumph and try for the consulship. So as soon as he entered the city he assumed a policy which deceived everyone except Cato. This policy was to reconcile Pompey and Crassus, the most influential men in the city. These men Caesar brought together in friendship after their quarrel, and by concentrating their united strength upon himself, succeeded, before men were aware of it, and by an act which could be called one of kindness, in changing the form of government. For it was not, as most men supposed, the quarrel between Caesar and Pompey that brought on the civil wars, but rather their friendship, since they worked together for the over-throw of the aristocracy in the first place, and then, when this had been accomplished, they quarrelled with one another. And Cato, who often foretold what was to come of their alliance, got the reputa-tion of a morose and troublesome fellow at the time, but afterwards that of a wise, though unfortunate, counsellor.

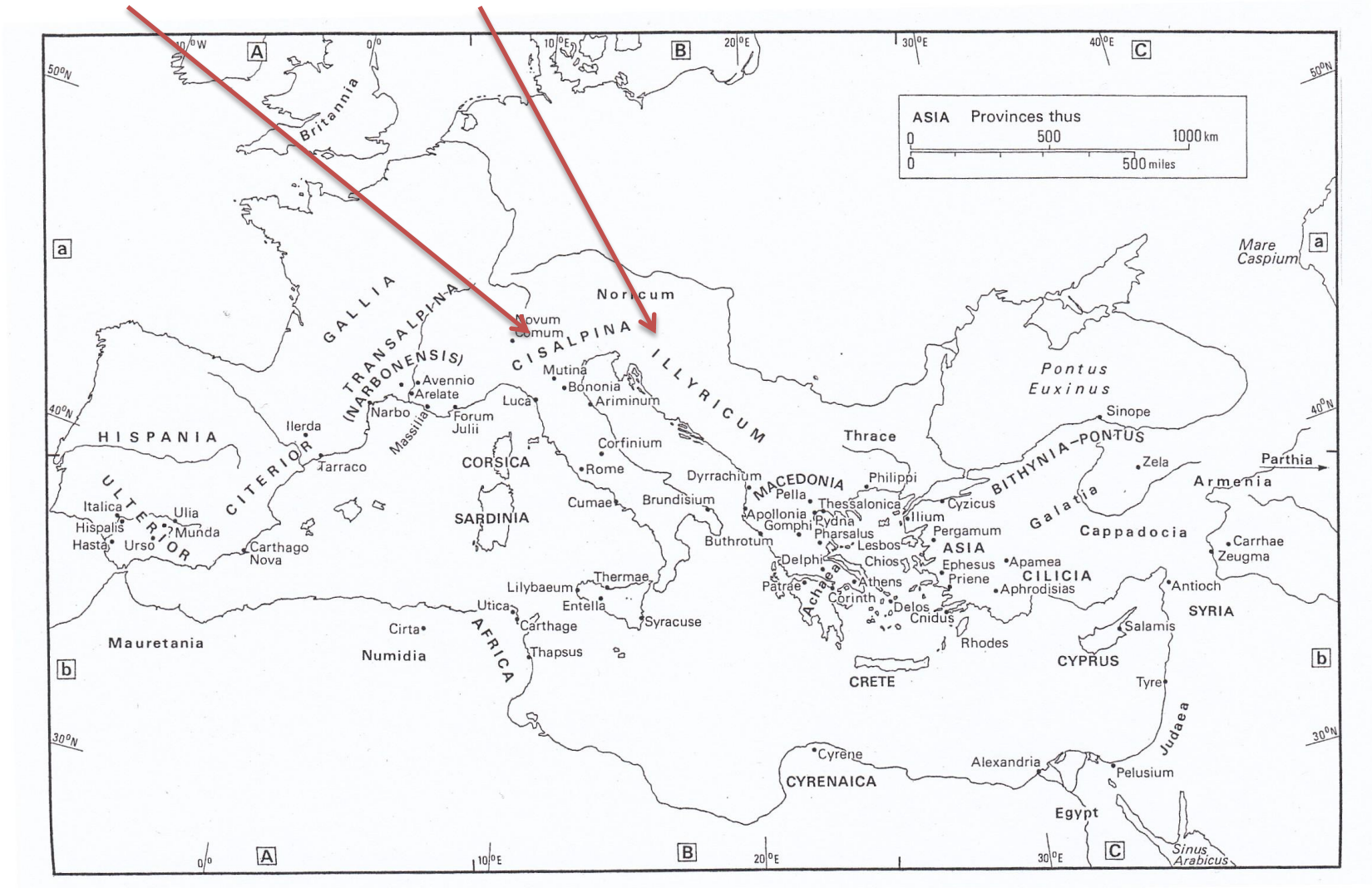
[14] Caesar, however, encompassed and protected by the friendship of Crassus and Pompey, entered the canvass for the consulship; and as soon as he had been triumphantly elected, along with **Calpurnius Bibulus**, and had entered upon his office [in 59 BC], he proposed laws which were becoming, not for a consul, but for a most radical tribune of the people; for to gratify the multitude he introduced sundry allotments and distributions of land.

Triumvirate

L. Calpurnius Bibulus , consul with Caesar (59)

P. Vatinius, tribune of the *plebs* (59)

Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum



P. Clodius, tribune of the *plebs* (58)

T. Annius Milo

Conference at Luca (56)

The conference at Luca

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 21: The Roman senate, on learning of these suc-cesses, decreed sacrifices to the gods and cessation from business, with festival, for fifteen days, a greater number than for any victory before. For the danger was seen to have been great when so many nations at once had broken out in revolt, and because Caesar was the victor, the good will of the multitude to-wards him made his victory more splendid. Caesar himself, after settling matters in Gaul, again spent the winter [57-56] in the regions along the Po, carrying out his plans at Rome. For not only did the candidates for office there enjoy his assistance, and win their elections by corrupting the people with money from him, and do everything which was likely to enhance his power, but also most of the men of highest rank and greatest influence came to see him at Luca [April, 56], including Pompey, Crassus, Appius the governor of Sardinia, and Nepos the proconsul of Spain, so that there were a hundred and twenty lictors in the place and more than two hundred senators

They held a council and settled matters on the following basis. Pompey and Crassus were to be elected consuls for the ensuing year, and Caesar was to have money voted him, besides another five years in his provincial command. This seemed very strange to men of understanding. For those who were getting so much money from Caesar urged the senate to give him money as if he had none, nay rather, they forced it to do so, though it groaned over its own decrees. Cato, indeed, was not there, for he had purposely been sent out of the way on a mission to Cyprus, and Favonius, who was an ardent follower of Cato, finding himself unable to accomplish anything by his opposition, bounded out of doors and clamoured to the populace. But no one gave heed to him, for some were in awe of Pompey and Crassus, and most wanted to please Caesar, lived in hopes of his favours, and so kept quiet.

Caesar attempts to negotiate a settlement

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 30-31: However, the demands which came from Caesar certainly had a striking resemblance of fairness. He demanded, namely, that if he himself laid down his arms, Pompey should do the same, and that both, thus become private men, should find what favour they could with their fellow citizens; arguing that if they took away his forces from him, but confirmed Pompey in the possession of his, they would be accusing one of seeking a tyranny and making the other a tyrant. When Curio laid these proposals before the people on behalf of Caesar, he was loudly applauded, and some actually cast garlands of flowers upon him as if he were a victorious athlete. Antony, too, who was a tribune, brought before the people a letter of Caesar's on these matters which he had received, and read it aloud, in defiance of the consuls. But in the senate, Scipio, the father-in-law of Pompey, introduced a motion that if by a fixed day Caesar did not lay down his arms he should be declared a public enemy. And when the consuls put the question whether Pompey should dismiss his soldiers, and again whether Caesar should, very few senators voted for the first, and all but a few for the second; but when Antony again demanded that both should give up their commands, all with one accord assented. Scipio, however, made violent opposition, and Lentulus the consul cried out that against a robber there was need of arms, not votes; whereupon the senate broke up, and the senators put on the garb of mourning in view of the dissension.

Caesar attempts to negotiate a settlement

But presently letters came from Caesar in which he appeared to take a more moderate position, for he agreed to surrender everything else, but demanded that Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum together with two legions should be given him until he stood for his second consulship. Cicero the orator, too, who had just returned from Cilicia and was busy with a reconciliation, tried to mollify Pompey, who yielded everything else, but insisted on taking away Caesar's soldiers. Cicero also tried to persuade the friends of Caesar to compromise and come to a settlement on the basis of the provinces mentioned and only six thousand soldiers, and Pompey was ready to yield and grant so many. Lentulus the consul, however, would not let him, but actually heaped insults upon Antony and Curio and drove them disgracefully from the senate, thus himself contriving for Caesar the most specious of his pretexts, and the one by means of which he most of all incited his soldiers, showing them men of repute and high office who had fled the city on hired carts and in the garb of slaves. For thus they had arrayed themselves in their fear and stolen out of Rome.

Caesar's motives

Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 30: But when the senate declined to interfere, and his opponents declared that they would accept no compromise in a matter affecting the public welfare, he crossed to Hither Gaul, and after holding all the assizes, halted at Ravenna, intending to resort to war if the senate took any drastic action against the tribunes of the commons who interposed vetoes in his behalf. Now this was his excuse for the civil war, but it is believed that he had other motives. Gnaeus Pompeius used to declare that since Caesar's own means were not sufficient to complete the works which he had planned, nor to do all that he had led the people to expect on his return, he desired a state of general unrest and turmoil. Others say that he dreaded the necessity of rendering an account for what he had done in his first consulship contrary to the auspices and the laws, and regardless of vetoes; for Marcus Cato often declared, and took oath too, that he would impeach Caesar the moment he had disbanded his army. It was openly said too that if he was out of office on his return, he would be obliged, like Milo, to make his defence in a court hedged about by armed men.

Caesar's motives

The latter opinion is the more credible one in view of the assertion of Asinius Pollio, that when Caesar at the battle of Pharsalus saw his enemies slain or in flight, he said, word for word: 'They would have it so. Even I, Gaius Caesar, after so many great deeds, should have been found guilty, if I had not turned to my army for help.' Some think that habit had given him a love of power, and that weighing the strength of his adversaries against his own, he grasped the opportunity of usurping the despotism which had been his heart's desire from early youth. Cicero too was seemingly of this opinion, when he wrote in the third book of his *On Duties* [3.82] that Caesar ever had upon his lips these lines of Euripides, of which Cicero himself adds a version:

'If wrong may e'er be right, for a throne's sake
Were wrong most right: – be god in all else feared.'

Macedonia
Scodra
Lissus
ILLYRIA
DARDANIA
MAEDI
THRACE
PARTHINI
R. Drilo
Uscana
PAEONIA
Stobi
R. Strymon
R. Nestus
Epidamnus
(Dyrrhachium)
PELAGONIA
R. Erigon
R. Axius
Heraclea
Sintica
SAPAEI
Maronea
Lychnidus
LYNCESTIS
Ottolobus
Mt.
Bora
Edessa
Pella
BISALTICA
Amphipolis
Abdera
Antipatreia
Banitza Pass
Apollonia
R. Apsus
EORDAEA
Thessalonica
THASOS
ORESTIS
Celetrum
Beroea
CHALCIDICE
Acanthus
Antigoneia
R. Haliacmon
Antigoneia
Oricus
ATINTANIA
R. Aoüs
Pydna
PIERIA
R. Drinus
ELIMIOTIS
Petra
Cassandreia
Dium
Heracleum
Phila
Phoenice
EPIRUS
PERRHAEBIA
Zygos Pass
Chyretiae
TEMPE
LEMNOS
Phaloria
Tricca
Larissa
CORCYRA
Dodona
R. Peneus
Atrax
Cynoscephalae
Pherae
THESSALIA
Demetrias
ATHAMANIA
Pharsalus
Thaumaci
Ambracia
DOLOPIA
ACHAEA
PHTHIOTIS
Xyniae
Echinus
Lamia
R. Spercheus
Oreus
PEPARETHOS
H. A. S.

Exceptional honours granted to Caesar

Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 57: However, the Romans gave way before the good fortune of the man and accepted the bit, and regarding the monarchy as a respite from the evils of the civil wars, they appointed him dictator for life. This was confessedly a tyranny, since the monarchy, besides the element of irresponsibility, now took on that of permanence. It was Cicero who proposed the first honours for him in the senate, and their magnitude was, after all, not too great for a man; but others added excessive honours and vied with one another in proposing them, thus rendering Caesar odious and obnoxious even to the mildest citizens because of the pretension and extravagance of what was decreed for him. It is thought, too, that the enemies of Caesar no less than his flatterers helped to force these measures through, in order that they might have as many pretexts as possible against him and might be thought to have the best reasons for attempting his life. For in all other ways, at least, after the civil wars were over, he showed himself blameless; and certainly it is thought not inappropriate that the temple of Clemency was decreed as a thank-offering in view of his mildness. For he pardoned many of those who had fought against him, and to some he even gave honours and offices besides, as to Brutus and Cassius, both of whom were now praetors.

Relevant reading:

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- Seager, R. (1979), *Pompey: A Political Biography*, Oxford.
- Wiseman, T. P. (1994), 'The senate and the *populares*, 69-60 B.C.', in J. A. Crook, *et al*., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History,* volume 9: The last age of the Roman republic 146-43 B.C., second edition, 327-367.
- Wiseman, T. P. (1994), 'Caesar, Pompey and Rome, 59-50 B.C.', in J. A. Crook, *et al*., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History,* volume 9: The last age of the Roman republic 146-43 B.C., second edition, 368-423.